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## Bodhisattva's Eyes: On Vasubandhu's no-self view and Implication of the Universal Benevolence

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### ABSTRACT

As Parfit observes, the dichotomy between self-interest and morality causes the failure of moral actions in real life. One approach to resolve this conflict is Sidgwick's impersonal ethics. This paper examines Sidgwick's maxim of benevolence and outlines its underlying assumption: the accessibility of the universal point of view. Then, this paper reconstructs Vasubandhu's no-self view in *Abihidharmakośa* and responds to two personalistic arguments, ultimately arguing that people can practice impersonal ethics if they overcome the illusion of self through Yogācārā's meditation, as a metaphysical entity and as a mental construct.

**Keywords:** Yogācārā Buddhism, Vasubandhu, Sidgwick, impersonal ethics, personal identity, reductionism, moral conflicts, *Abihidharmakośa*.

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### 1. Introduction: The dichotomy between self-interest and morality

To be moral and satisfy one's self-interests are not always compatible.

Self-interests theory holds the following principle: for each person, there is one supremely rational ultimate aim—that his life goes, for him, as well as possible (Parfit, p.4). To satisfy this aim, people have reason to maximize their self-interests in their actions. While self-interests demand people to place their interests over others', morality requires people to genuinely care for others' welfare, even with the sacrifice of personal benefits. When we see others in danger, self-interests theory wants us to step away to preserve the life, but morality provides an altruistic incentive to help that person, even risk our self-interests of survival. The dichotomy between self-interest and ethics causes failures of moral actions in reality since many people lack incentives to be moral when their self-interests are denied.

There are attempts to reconcile the gap between self-interest and ethics, one of which is Sidgwick's universal benevolence in *The Method of Ethics*. However, it rests on an unjustified

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assumption of no-self or impersonal perspective as Williams pointed out (pp.108-118). Moreover, some philosophers argue that self-interest preference is an inescapable intuition (Nagel, p.104). This paper tries to provide a justification from a novel perspective, Buddhist ethics, and demonstrate that people can reconcile the dichotomy between self-interest and ethics on an experiential level. Moreover, I'll primarily focus on Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* as the source as well as other classics of early Buddhism.

The current studies on personal identity and impersonal ethics encounter a challenge: the rational argument is insufficient to justify impersonal ethics if people must retain the self-interest bias on the experiential level. On the other hand, Indian Buddhist philosophy isn't fully recognized by western academia since a lot of early texts lacked clarity. This paper aims to fill the existing gap by reconstructing Buddhist ethics with philosophical clarity and providing an experiential justification for the challenge faced by impersonal ethics.

In part two, I will introduce Sidgwick's *maxim of universal benevolence* and argue that it depends on the further commitment of no-self. In the third section, I reconstruct Vasubandhu's argument of no-self in *Treasury of Knowledge (Abhidharmakośa)*<sup>2</sup> and argue that it provides the justification needed for Sidgwick's universal benevolence. In the fourth part, I discuss two challenges to Vasubandhu's arguments: Vātsīputriyas suggests that there must be a logical posit of self, while some contemporary philosophers believe that the constructed notion of self is ultimately inescapable. I will challenge them respectively, arguing that liberation from self is achievable. Finally, I evaluate the significance of no-self on universal benevolence and impersonal ethics.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Universal benevolence and its challenge

### 2.1 Maxim of universal benevolence

Sidgwick states a maxim that he finds intuitively persuasive to accept if an agent reaches the reflective equilibrium in *The Method of Ethics*.

The maxim of Benevolence: each one is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as his own, except in so far he judges it to be less, when impartially viewed, or less certainly knowable or attainable by him (Sidgwick p.382).

The maxim of Benevolence directly challenges self-interest theory: it shows there's no ground to prioritize ourselves' interests, and moral agents should put equal weights on the interests of others as if they are their own. If this maxim is right, then we ought to reject self-interest theory. In other words, Sidgwick provides an alternative that makes morality possible to replace self-interest theory.

1. We should either hold self-interest theory or the maxim of benevolence true.
2. We should hold maxim of benevolence true.
3. We should reject the self-interest theory.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.2 Challenge to the point of view of the universe and solution

This approach, however, is not without critiques. The maxim is not self-evident, because Sidgwick deduces it from two primitive principles:

Principle 1: The good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the *point of view of the universe*, than the good of any other...

Principle2: And it is evident to me that as a rational being I am bound to aim at good generally, not merely at a particular part of it (Sidgwick, 382).

The two self-evident principles rely heavily on an implicit premise: there is the *point of view of the universe*<sup>5</sup>, a point of view that is possible only if the distinction between "me" and "others" is

<sup>2</sup> These arguments appear in *Atmavādapratishedha*, the appendix of *Abhidharmakośa*. In this paper, I primarily focus on Vasubandhu's text, but I will use general Yogācārā Buddhist thoughts in the fourth section as well.

<sup>3</sup> I do not want to provide a comprehensive examination of Buddhism's complicated thoughts in one paper, nor do I focus exclusively on Buddhist ideas. Instead, the primary goal is to implement Vasubandhu's arguments to support universal benevolence and argue that this ideal is achievable.

<sup>4</sup> In logical form,  $(x) (y) (\neg[x=y] \vee [x=y])$ . Strictly speaking, this argument works only if "holding S" is semantically equivalent to "not holding MB" ( $S = \neg MB$ ). I suggest this strategy applies in this scenario.

<sup>5</sup> The point of view of the universe may be misleading. Some may argue that from the view of the universe, things are just things: there is no morality. I believe Sidgwick is suggesting an objective perspective, not necessarily departing from all values.

abandoned. If we have an objective standpoint as an observer, there are reasons to suggest that nobody's interest is more important.

In practice, however, we view the world from a certain point, using the eyes, and the person as a kind of window (Nagel, 104). The seemingly self thereby establishes particular perspectives, preferences, desires, and values... Through this first-person narrative, we provide the foundation for our desires, preferences, love, hatred, and various emotions, and we attach these emotions that uniquely *belong* to ourselves. It ultimately promotes us to favor self-interest over the interests of others. While the point of view of the universe requires us to impartially concern everyone's wellbeing, the distinction between person and person implies the impossibility of a such point of view.

Williams' challenge to impersonal utilitarianism corroborates this argument. For Williams, impersonal morality is too harsh to follow since doing so harms our goal to live a good life. He argues that impersonal demands exclude the commitments to personal projects such as love and friendship that make our life meaningful (Williams 108-118). Thus, equal caring for others' lives reduces our resources and opportunity to focus primarily on personal projects that are meaningful to us: this requirement implies the sacrifice of personal interests as it is no longer the supreme goal. This view seems appealing and supports a widely held intuition, but I only want to highlight the close association between the existence of a particular person and the tendency to favor self-interests as a requirement to live a good life in Williams' objection.

Thus, the critics deny premise (2) of Sidgwick's arguments, because they believe that the universal point of view is impossible given the interrelation between the existence of person and self-interests, which implies the inaccessibility of the universal perspective. I cannot provide an objection to this association for it sounds plausible to me. If that's the case, the success of Sidgwick's maxim of benevolence thus depends on a critical question: is there a person to be found at all?

I argue:

4. If there is no person that is necessarily associated with a particular perspective, there are no interests or reactive emotions that belong to ourselves.

5. If there are no interests or reactive emotions that belong to ourselves, the point of view of the universe is attainable.

6. If the point of view of the universe is attainable, we should not consider personal interests as more important than those of others, rationally speaking.

7. There is no person<sup>6</sup> that necessarily associates with a particular perspective.

8. We should not consider personal interests as more important than those of others, rationally speaking (maxim of benevolence).

The key premise is (7), which is the key distinction between self-interest theory and impersonal morality.<sup>7</sup> I argue that (7) is true because there is no such a person to be found in reality other than a mental construct, so there are no interests that uniquely associated with ourselves. Moreover, I suggest this mental construct is eliminable in section four.

### 3. Reconstruction of Vasubandhu's no-self view

Before we examine the existence of a self, clarification of the concept is essential. When we talk about a person or personal identity in our language, we have two meanings.

Firstly, we may refer to a metaphysical entity that persists in changing spatial-temporal relations. It is this metaphysical entity that unifies all the experiences and sense data together. Since it persists in changing spatial-temporal relations, it must at least have some essential parts unchanged, so the personal identity is defined. In the Buddhist tradition, this notion of the self is defined as *pudgala*, the target that Vasubandhu attacks.

Secondly, we may refer to an "I am" attitude embedded in our language and actions or a sense of self. Although this attitude does not need metaphysical commitment, it shares the view that there must be a unifier that unifies all experiences together and gives a definite perspective to each of us. In

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<sup>6</sup> I use a "person" as a nominal designator that we use in ordinary language, but I do not suggest it is a genuine existence.

<sup>7</sup> Sidgwick himself did not go this far for he maintained that the point of view of the universe is the key distinction between self-interest theory and what he called commonsense ethics. However, I've suggested that this distinction is reducible to the distinction between self and no-self.

contrast with the metaphysical self of *pudgala*, this conventional, empirical idea of self is called *attabhāva*.

In this section, I challenge the first idea of the metaphysical self only, and I will examine the empirical self (*attabhāva*) in the fourth section.<sup>8</sup>

In general, Vasubandhu's strategy is a form of reductionism, arguing that *pudgala* or metaphysical self is reducible to elementary components, *skandhas*. Vasubandhu argues:

We should examine whether this *pudgala* exists as an entity or as a designation of a nominal existence. If it has a separate existence, like physical matter, then the *pudgala* exists as an entity. If it is only a collection<sup>9</sup>, like milk, then it exists as a designation (Vasubandhu, 1314).

Vasubandhu clarifies a distinction between nominal existence and entity (ultimate existence). If a *pudgala* has a unique nature that differs from a collection, it is a metaphysical entity that is irreducible; if it is only a name assigned to a collection of more fundamental compositions, it is a nominal existence as a designator. For example, according to the Buddhist conception of reality, color, sound, etc., are distinct entities (*bhinnalaksana*). Milk, army, and vehicle are but collections of colors, tastes, and tangibles... They are only nominal existences that designate different collections. Therefore, Vasubandhu makes the following classification:

9. A self is the ultimate reality (*paramattha-sacca, paramārthasatya*) if and only if it is a metaphysical entity with separable, irreducible nature.

10. A self is a conventional reality (*sammuti-sacca, samvrtisatya*) if and only if it is a nominal designator of a collection of more fundamental elements.<sup>10</sup>

11. A self (*pudgala*) is either a metaphysical entity that has separable, irreducible nature or a nominal designator of a collection of more fundamental elements.

From (9) (10) (11), we can infer:

12. A self is either an ultimate reality or a conventional reality.

Vasubandhu continues:

If the *pudgala* is an entity, it will be different from the *skandhas* (aggregates), because its nature is separate, as the *skandhas* are different from another, and you will have to name its causes, or it will be unconditioned. However, if it is causally unconditioned... a person has no function [to perform in the production of aggregates]. But if you admit that the person exists only as a title of designation, you will concur with our doctrines (Vasubandhu, 1314).

*Skandhas*, or aggregates, are a collection of substances of different sorts in a causal continuum (Duerlinger, 308). These sorts collectively compose our body, and mental states, and become phenomena. When we use aggregates, we are hence not only referring to Humean experiences, but also to physical form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), cognition (*sanna*), constructing activities such as will and volition (*sankhāras*), and consciousness or discernment (*vinnāna/ vikalpa*) (Harvey, 4).<sup>11</sup> These aggregates compose our physical actions and psychological activities.<sup>12</sup>

Vasubandhu suggests that if there exists (*santam*) a person as a metaphysical entity with natures and permanent identities that persist in changing spatial-temporal relationships, its nature must be conceived to differ from aggregates since aggregates lack such nature of permanence. What "differ" means is puzzling, but I believe that Vasubandhu is not only suggesting the self is not identical to aggregates. Instead, his position is more like a verificationist account: self is a metaphysical entity if and only if it is distinctly separable in existence from the five aggregates or self is a substance that exists apart from the five aggregates (Duerlinger, 311).<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, the separation of self from aggregates must be epistemically accessible to people either by direct perception or inference, otherwise, we have sufficient reason to believe that the self is

8 Here I will frequently quote Vasubandhu's writing. For concision, I will only use English translation and not the original Sanskrit texts or Chinese translation.

9 Colors, sound, etc., are distinct things (*bhinnalaksana*); milk is a collection of color, taste, etc. (*bhāvāntara*)

10 9 & 10 are mutually exclusive in Vasubandhu's system since a thing cannot contain an irreducible nature while can be reducible to more fundamental elements. 9&10 contain mutually excluded properties.

11 There are ten discernments. The early version of discernments includes perceptions, while the later version only includes conceptualization. 十種分別者：根本分別，謂阿賴耶識；緣相分別，謂色等識；顯相分別，謂眼識等並所依識...《攝大乘論》

12 Although Vasubandhu's approach relies on a religious tradition that western philosophers may not accept, we can consider the reductionist approach differently. These *skandhas* are fundamental not because they are metaphysically fundamental entities but because they are epistemically primitive to our experiences. Buddhism has a strong emphasis on epistemology and personal experience (體驗).

13 If the *pudgala* is unconditioned, it is like space, like not existing. See Yaśomitra and Dharmakīrti's comments in Sarvadarśana, p. 10 (1858).

reducible to the aggregates. According to this view, when we say “a” is not “b”, we semantically posit that “a” and “b” possess different natures that are epistemically accessible for us in existence to separate “a” from “b”. For nominal existence, however, such distinct natures that are epistemically accessible for us to separate a designator from its constituents are not found, so we have reason to conclude that the designator is metaphysically reducible to a collection of its constituents. This is the accessibility requirement of existence:

Accessibility Requirement of Existence (ARE): x exists as a metaphysical entity if and only if it possesses certain distinct natures that are epistemically accessible through either perception or inference.<sup>14</sup>

The question becomes: are we separable from our aggregates or is self as a distinct entity epistemically accessible? Vasubandhu's reply is negative. He firstly points out that the metaphysical self is not directly observable by our perceptions or inference: even personalists conceive selves in reliance upon the material form and consciousness provided by their aggregates. Indeed, we cannot directly communicate with our metaphysical selves, if they really exist, since all we have is but our bodies, perceptual systems, and consciousnesses. Imagine if all these aggregates cease to function, it will be hardly possible to imagine the existence of such a further self beyond the naïve notion of soul.<sup>15</sup> However, personalists may insist that the self needs aggregates as its basis, while the self essentially is different from aggregates. This view is the dependence thesis:

Dependence Thesis (DT): the self is epistemically accessible in reliance upon the five aggregates.

Vasubandhu explains:

Let us examine what the word “*pudgala*” depends on. If it depends on *skandhas*, then the *pudgala* exists solely as a designation, as the expression *pudgala* depends (依) on the *skandhas* and not on a real *pudgala* (Vasubandhu, 1318).

He argues that the dependence thesis fails to justify the metaphysical commitment of *pudgala* because it is merely a constructed notion. When people believe that the self depends on aggregates, they fail to highlight the distinct nature that uniquely belongs to the self and fail to separate the self from aggregates. Therefore, according to Vasubandhu, the dependence thesis fails to accomplish the accessibility requirement of existence, so we should not grant the metaphysical entity to self but treat it as a designator of aggregates.

I reconstruct Vasubandhu's argument into the following form:

13. The self is only epistemically accessible in reliance upon the five aggregates (DT).

14. If the self is only epistemically accessible in reliance upon the five aggregates, the self does not possess unique natures based on which the self is epistemically conceived.

15. If the notion of self does not possess unique natures based on which the self is epistemically conceived, the self does not differ from his or her aggregates through perception or inference (ARE).

16. If the notion of self does not epistemically differ in existence from his or her aggregates through perception or inference, the notion of self is not the ultimate reality.

Given the premise (12) and (16).

17. The concept of self is conventional reality (nominal existence without metaphysical existence).<sup>16</sup>

In conclusion, Vasubandhu challenges *pudgala* by using a reductionist account to show that the dependence thesis of metaphysical person fails to satisfy the accessibility requirement of existence because it does not possess distinct natures to be conceived beyond the aggregates. Therefore, a person as a metaphysical entity does not exist.

## 4. Escape from two ideas of self

### 4.1 Person as logical posit

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<sup>14</sup> ARE is a necessary condition: all existences satisfy ARE. However, not all that satisfies ARE is existence (e.g., Mickey Mouse).

<sup>15</sup> Even the imagination of the soul depends on consciousness. Without consciousness, conceptualization is impossible.

<sup>16</sup> This reductionist argument is consistent with early Buddhist philosophy. See Nāgasena's discourse with the king in *Milinda Pañha*, in which Nāgasena argues that “no person is found,” and what is left is but a name, a metaphor to designate the aggregates.

Not everyone accepts this reductionist view. One way is to challenge the method: reductionism does not rule out the logical necessity. Personalists argue that the existence of a metaphysical self as an entity is embedded in the logical posit—if there are appropriated aggregates (*upādānaskandhas*), there must be appropriators (*upādātā*).<sup>17</sup> Although empirically speaking there is no self as a metaphysical entity, people can still infer its existence from logical necessity.

Firstly, we should be cautious about this idea. By doing so, personalists treat the self as an inexplicable, mysterious posit that is available only through so-called logical necessity. A person's ontological status, however, is extremely vague. Such an account is highly redundant and mysterious, so I believe that we should not accept this ontological commitment unless we do not have an alternative option to explain the unification of experience.

Secondly, the logical argument of personalists does not necessarily provide the ontological commitment. What this logical argument implies is that (a) there are certain unifiers to unify people's different experiences and aggregates, and (b) the existence of these unifiers is logically necessary. Whether these unifiers are metaphysical entities or mental constructs is not mentioned. These unifiers can be reduced to mental constructions, which are sufficient to unify our experiences as a whole. Therefore, if personalists want to justify that the logical posit of a person implies the existence of a metaphysical entity behind aggregates, further arguments are needed, but personalists are not justified to infer the existence of a person from the logical posit.

Thus, contrary to considering the unifier as a metaphysical entity, we should consider it as a seemingly necessary mental construct that unifies our experiences together and creates a necessary “I am” conceit (我見).

#### 4.2 Person (*attabhava*) as an Inescapable Mental Construct

Here, what we left unexamined is the last, perhaps also the most critical, notion of the person: a person is an inescapable mental construct (*prajnaptisat*). This belief is so widely accepted that even those who deny the existence of a metaphysical person believe that a constructed self is necessarily needed to explain the psychological continuity and unification of experiences. As ordinary people, we seem to have a subjective, first-person perspective that provides the “I am” attitude and determines the way to perceive the world.

This constructed person has equal explanatory power as the metaphysical self has: it grounds the self-interest bias in our consciousness and implies the impossibility of the point of view of the universe as opposed to the first-person narrative. Furthermore, as I have argued before, the constructed notion of a person provides sufficient rational incentive for people to favor their interests over the welfare of others. As rational agents, if people must possess a definite, biased perspective, they cannot enter the universal point of view on which impersonal morality is based. As a result of the systematic failure, people are programmed by this constructed person to be self-interest orientated and act in a way to maximize their self-interests.

The last part of the personalists' argument is to indicate that this constructed notion of the self is genuinely ineliminable. Personalists believe this is the case. A common opinion is that the self is not a doxastic belief but a framework belief, which is the foundation of our conceptual scheme, ordinary actions, and language (Albahari, p.5). This framework belief is often taken to be granted, as an unalienable perspective of our worldview. Without this framework belief, our survivals are impossible. Damasio believes:

When the mental aspect of self is suspended, the advantages of consciousness soon disappear. Individual life regulation is no longer possible in a complex environment... This, and comparable examples, would suggest that a state of consciousness that encompasses a sense of self as conceptualized in this book is indispensable for survival (Damasio, 304).

The reason for personalists to insist that the self is a framework belief rooted in our epistemic structure is that self is not merely a doxastic belief anchored in propositional knowledge. If the self is a doxastic belief such as that we hold scientific knowledge, we should be able to correct such delusionary ideas in our epistemic system once we realize that it is false. For example, when a superstitious person fully understands the reason for Newtonian physics, it will be easy for him or her to explain the

<sup>17</sup> If there are experiences restricted by a particular perspective, there must be a person associated with such perspective.

acceleration without invoking any supernatural force. That epistemic change is relatively easy because the nature of doxastic beliefs is adjustable. Even philosophers who realize that the metaphysical self does not exist, however, still perceive the world from a first-person narrative and attach emotions and interests to themselves in actions: this asymmetry implies that the self is not a doxastic belief of propositional knowledge, but a framework belief rooted in our conceptual system that is not subject to modification. For personalists:

18. The constructed notion of a person is either a doxastic belief or a framework belief rooted in our conceptual system and cannot be eliminated.

19. If a constructed person is a doxastic belief, we should be able to adjust its content if we have new, persuasive knowledge available (no-self).

20. We cannot adjust its content if we have new, persuasive knowledge available (no-self).

21. The constructed notion of a person is not a doxastic belief.

We may infer the conclusion from (18) and (21):

22. The constructed notion of person is a framework belief rooted in our conceptual system and cannot be eliminated.

### 4.3 Free from mental construct

In this section, I will deny (18) by arguing (a) the mental construct is redundant to explaining psychological continuity and unification of experiences, (b) even the so-called framework belief is eliminable, and there are practical ways to eliminate this mental construct.

Firstly, in contrast to our intuition, any sense of the self is not needed to explain memory, psychological continuity, and unification of experiences.

Vasubandhu explains how this self is constructed:

One says that when a flame burns a field it travels, although they are only moments of flame because it constitutes a series; in the same way, the harmony of the skandhas which is constantly repeated receives, metaphorically, the name of being; supported by thirst, the series of skandhas travels in samsara (Vasubandhu, 1337).

A series of aggregates constantly changes while causally connected. Since ordinary people have thirst (*tanhā*) and ignorance (*avidyā*), they falsely cut a section of this continuing series, believe that this section of skandhas belongs to a definite person, and name it as a unified self. Then, he uses the no-self view to explain how this memory arises, he proposes:

Memory and recognition are generated immediately, in a series, from a certain type of mind (*citta-viśeṣa*), when this type of mind arises from the idea of an object already perceived and which one calls the object of the memory ... We have explained what the agent of this action is (to grasp the object by memory), namely a certain type of mind (Vasubandhu, 1339).<sup>18</sup>

According to the Buddhist explanation of memories and the unification of consciousnesses, they are generated from a certain type of mind that actively identifies and tries to grasp the objects perceived. Through the action of "grasping," a constructed notion of a person is established because ordinary people believe that these consciousnesses uniquely attach to themselves (Harvey, 37). But there is merely a changing consciousness as a conditioned phenomenon without the supposition of a continuing self (Collins, 104). Thus, what causes the appearance of memories and unified consciousness is consciousness itself, while the thirst and grasping (*upādāna*) create the illusion of self.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, I argue that the so-called framework belief is eliminable and there are methods to approach this termination. What does "framework belief" mean? I agree with personalists' account that such a construct is not merely a doxastic belief of propositional knowledge since knowing that there is no self is insufficient to remove the defilement: there must be something deeper. But this doesn't imply the mental construct is without doxastic elements because, without the involvement of doxastic beliefs, framework beliefs are arbitrary. Instead, I suggest the mental construct is the outcome of both doxastic belief and a more stubborn belief, action-based belief (Albahari, 15-21). Action-based beliefs ground our everyday actions: we have observable patterns of emotions<sup>20</sup> and act in the way as if

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18 Paramārtha, "Not different from memory, for the memory grasps."

19 Consciousness is part of the aggregates, so what we believe to be person is nothing apart from aggregates.

20 See Zimmerman's account of action-based desires. If a person desires that p, then coming to believe that p elicits positive emotion and vice versa (Zimmerman, 64).

there is a unique self that distinctly belongs to us. The action-based beliefs reversely strengthen our conception of the self not only because our ordinary emotions and actions are based on them but also because they have been integrated within one's conceptual scheme and shared by a linguistic community. Thus, the constructed person as a framework belief is a complex of both doxastic beliefs of knowledge and recalcitrant action-based beliefs that provide the foundation of our emotions and actions.

I argue:

23. If the mentally constructed person is the outcome of our biased doxastic beliefs and action-based beliefs, we can replace the contents of these beliefs through the integration of correct views and practices as if there is no such a self.

24. If we can replace the contents of these beliefs through the integration of correct views and practices as if there is no such a self, we can eliminate or at least reduce the importance of the constructed notion of the self.

25. The mentally constructed person is the outcome of our biased doxastic beliefs and action-based beliefs.

26. We can eliminate or at least reduce the importance of the constructed notion of the self.

If my opinion to interpret the constructed self as the complex of doxastic and action-based beliefs is plausible, (23) should so far be relatively apparent. Even if action-based beliefs are deeply accepted, we can change them by implementing corrected behaviors. However, by no means this replacement is easy as it challenges our shared linguistic agreements and behavioral patterns, but the change is conceivable. For (24), I need to propose a methodology to reach the elimination of self and universal point of view.<sup>21</sup>

As mentioned before, the construct of the self is ultimately driven by an array of *tanhā* (mental preference and aversion)-based emotions and behaviors. Because of this nature, people can ultimately remove the self to attain *nibbana* by removing discernment, craving for possession, and attachments.<sup>22</sup> Liberation is an experience without any sense of craving and a self that is based on craving. As Gombrich suggests:

Nirvāna in life is the cessation of craving, alias greed-hatred-and-delusion, and is indescribable because it is the opposite of the process of life as we know it (Gombrich, 492).

According to Buddhism, an Arahāt<sup>23</sup> who attains *nibbāna* still has consciousness but does not misinterpret this so as to hold the conceit that he is a self (有餘依涅槃).<sup>24</sup> The feeling is observed to arise as a conditioned process. He or she no longer attaches to the personality factors, and it is only by so clinging that he can consider 'this is mine, this I am, this is my self' (Harvey, 33).<sup>25</sup>

An Arahāt achieves the ultimate liberation through meditation, fully understanding the delusion of self, and implementing new action-based beliefs to guide his or her action, such as perceiving the consciousness as it is and helping others to attain liberation as well. Through the implementation of new practices based on no-self, people's conceptual system is likely to have a transformative shift. Although the actual effect of meditation still requires future research, current psychological experiments have indicated that long-term meditation substantially erodes practitioners' emotionally reactive behaviors, suggesting that meditation as a method to erode the self is plausible (Davidson, 173).<sup>26</sup>

## 5. Conclusion: Path to benevolence

Let's reconsider Sidgwick's proposal of universal benevolence. So far, two conclusions are available.

C1: There is no metaphysical self as an entity since such a self fails to satisfy the accessibility requirement of existence.

21 I cannot provide a comprehensive account of Buddhist methodology to reach liberation (*nibbāna*) here. What I want to accomplish in this paper is to provide a broad picture and suggest that this picture is realizable.

22 由於現前住安立一切相中，無所作意無所分別，斷分別故(《攝大乘論》)。

23 Arhatship is the highest status a practitioner can achieve. Beyond that is Bodhisattva, a preparation stage to become a future Buddha.

24 不離不染難行，不捨生死而不染故(《攝大乘論》)。

25 Discernment and conceptualization (*vikalpa*) ceases to function.

26 This research also suggests that meditation significantly improves the concentration of practitioners.



C2: Constructed self is redundant to explain the unification of experiences, and it is eliminable through the replacement of doxastic and action-based beliefs of no-self.

These two conclusions together are sufficient to argue for (7): no person necessarily associates with a particular perspective and the point of view of the universe is attainable. Combine (4) (5) (6) (7), we can infer (8) as the third conclusion:

C3: We should not consider personal interests as more important than those of others (maxim of benevolence).

The split between self and others is not insurmountable, though it is surely difficult to overcome this delusion of self through the transformation of original action-based beliefs. But I believe that the no-self view provides a basis for Sidgwick's maxim of benevolence and implies a path to achieve it: overcome the self and attain an objective point of view.

One clarification is that no-self combined with Sidgwick's ethics does not need to deny the existence of desires but merely suggests that we should not have a bias to favor so-called personal interests over others' wellbeing, for personal interests have no difference with others' if there's no subject-object dichotomy of the self. Ordinary people can still hold emotions and pursue happiness, but these goals should have equal weights to the welfare of others. No one is more important.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, this proposal of no-self may sound appalling for people who consider pleasures as the meaning of their lives because they need to quit from biased enjoyments and desires based on self-interest, but I believe this view provides solace on both individual and systematical levels.

In contrast to some hedonists' desire for pleasure, the no-self view provides relief on the individual level. When one perceives with wisdom that all conditioned things are impermanent, one turns away from suffering. This is the path of liberation (DhP 277).<sup>28</sup> Hedonists emphasize on pleasures are a heavy burden to bear for people: once we attain pleasures, we want to possess them (the craving for love<sup>29</sup>), but all these pleasures are impermanent and cannot be grasped since they are conditioned. As a result, we become slaves of emotions, desperately trying to attach our lives to transient pleasures. For those dissatisfied with the hedonist account of meaning, the no-self view helps them to detach from craving and the influence of negative reactive emotions, for they know this too shall pass. They live undisturbed.

No-self view also opens a door to impersonal ethics, a moral system that is realizable only if the subjective perception of the self disappears. The dichotomy between self-interest and others is a false division as it bases on an arbitrary belief of persons. When the conventional view of persons as metaphysical entities collapses, the dichotomy between self-interest and general welfare also collapses. Because illusion of persons is so deep-rooted, the development of impersonal ethics is yet primitive, and that is the reason why it is rational to have high hopes.

At last the horizon appears free to us again, even granted that it is not bright; at last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger...the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an open sea (Nietzsche 448).

In conclusion, through revising their deep framework beliefs, people overcome the pervasive cognitive distortion of persons, and they thus attain Sidgwick's benevolence to merge the dichotomy between morality and self-interest as they are aware that no particular good has more weight. All I argue is that this picture is rational to hold despite difficulties.

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27 Yogācārā Buddhism agrees with Sidgwick and merges the boundary between self-interest and other-interest. “復次，何故初地說明極喜？由此最初得能成辦自(self)他(others)義利(interests)，勝功能故。”

28 Sabbe sankhārā aniccā ti yadā paññāya passata atha nibbindati dukkha esa maggo visuddhiyā.

29 Not only romantic love but also love for objects, which ultimately turn out as a desire for possession.

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